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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

EVALUATION OF AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PEER SUPPORT TRAINING PROGRAM

BY

©

DEBRA ANN WEIR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1991

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DEDICATION

Proudly, and for all the right reasons,
I dedicate this thesis to my father.
Thanks Dad.

ABSTRACT

The Peer Support Training Evaluation (PSTE) designed by the researcher, was implemented in the course of this study as a means to measure the increase in empathic listening and communication skills in 116 grade 5 and grade 6 students in the County of Strathcona. One half of the group was trained in listening and communication skills within an elementary peer support training program. The other half was untrained.

Item analysis of the PSTE revealed that validity and reliability of the instrument were at acceptable levels. Significant differences between pre and post test score means of the trained group suggest that students' levels of empathic listening and communication increased as a result of participation in an elementary peer support training program. Findings based on further research questions and case studies lend support to the positive impact of the program on those trained.

Significance of the study lies in the fact that few empirical studies exist in the area of evaluation of peer support training programs, and fewer yet exist which target elementary levels.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Some three or four decades ago, particularly in colleges and universities, it became increasingly evident that students who were experiencing emotional difficulties most often turned to their peers rather than to professionals for advice and reassurance (Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972; Russel & Thompson, 1987; Samuels & Samuels, 1975). Tapping on this natural human instinct to seek one's peers in times of emotional crises, university and college administrators and counsellors recognized great advantage in training and utilizing students as lay or peer counsellors. Peer influence was found to be one of the best methods of organizing and using students to help other students become more successful in the school setting (Vassos, 1971). Thus the concept of peer support was created and specific programs, Peer Support Programs, were developed.

Peer Support Defined

The general idea of peer support is for trained and supervised students to listen to, support, and offer alternatives to their peers. They do not usually offer advice or "counselling" (Carr & Saunders, 1980). Peer support programs are generally designed as supportive programs which seek to reach those students in a school population who might not go to a professional for help with a problem. However, peer support programs are designed to complement the existing guidance and counselling program rather than replace it (Samuels & Samuels, 1975).

Students interested in becoming peer helpers either volunteer or are selected to be a part of the program and then attend training sessions to improve their natural helping skills. In fact, some researchers believe it is the individualized training program which is the most crucial factor in the success of the entire program (Bowman & Myrick, 1987; Kern & Kirby, 1971; Samuels & Samuels, 1975). In recognition of the importance of training, many school boards have allotted funds for interested counsellors, teachers or other volunteers to learn how to organize a peer support program and how to train the student helpers. Currently in Alberta, for example, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) sponsors such training sessions for potential peer support organizers. Research has shown that students generally find the training provides them with means to help their peers in times of emotional crises and is, also, invaluable in their own lives (Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972).

Peer Support in the Elementary School

Because of the success of peer support at college and university levels, programs have been incorporated into senior and junior high schools. School counsellors who have begun peer support programs have found that they are able to reach more students, provide faster and better service to students, and aid in the development of listening and communication skills to all who are trained (Solberg & Whitford, 1988).

Currently, many elementary guidance and counselling programs are including a peer support program as well (Allan, 1978; Bowman & Myrick, 1987; Canning, 1983). Though not as widely researched, evidence indicates that students as young as age 11 and 12 can be successfully trained to assist other students in thinking about ideas and feelings, exploring alternatives to situations and making responsible decisions (Bowman & Myrick, 1987; Kern & Kirby, 1971). Similar to their college, high school and junior high school counterparts, elementary school guidance counsellors are finding peer support programs are an effective means of reaching more students who need help (Bowman & Myrick, 1987; Stern, Fowler, & Kohler, 1988).

The most effective peer support programs are those that have been personalized to the specific needs of the students in a specific school (Edwards, 1976; Gumaer, 1973; Raiche, 1979). Where one school may need peer support team members to work exclusively as tutors or "study buddies", another may need team members to work with non-English speaking students, and another may need conflict managers. Still another may need all three, or something entirely different. When properly designed and implemented, peer support programs have become an integral part of the daily activities in their schools (Canning, 1983; McCann, 1975; Mitchum, 1983) and are the most rapidly growing phenomena in elementary school guidance and counselling programs (Myrick & Bowman, 1983).

Though the programs have achieved this popularity and positive reputation in elementary schools in a relatively short period of time, elementary peer support programs are not without their difficulties (deRosenroll, 1986a; Dougherty & Taylor, 1983). The area most in need of research is that of evaluation. Because of a lack of formal evaluative tools and techniques, programs have been established before needs have been assessed and identified. As a result, programs have not been sufficiently personalized to meet the needs of the students. It is not surprising that these programs have not been as well received. Consequently, in this era of fiscal conservatism, some schools have been unable to rationalize their continued need for a peer support program and have lost funding, and thus the program itself (Altman, Nysetvold, & Downe, 1986).

Reason For The Study

It appears that at this point in the evolution of elementary peer support programs a means of evaluation for the program is in order. As stated previously, it is a widely held contention that the pivotal aspect of any peer support program is training. Since success of the program largely depends upon the success of training, it seems a logical first step to evaluate this component of the peer support program.

The goal of any peer support training program is to assist students to develop their capacity for empathic listening and communicating so that they can help meet the needs of their peers. Most initial training programs are an eclectic combination of activities and lectures, the majority of which are generally administered during a one day "retreat" and in a subsequent series of sessions held over a period of three to six weeks. Most peer support trainers consider formal training complete at this point, though further supplementary training often occurs sporadically for the duration of the program (Carr &

Saunders, 1980; Cole, 1987; Myrick & Erney, 1979; Rockwell & Dustin 1979).

As stated previously, little attention has been paid to the difficult area of evaluation of the formal training program. It is generally accepted that students who have been selected for the team have already exhibited abilities in the areas on which training focuses. However, trainers have few means to determine the level of skill at which students start the training program, and whether the level changes with the completion of the training program. Thus they have no means to determine if their individualized training program has been of any benefit. The purpose of this study is therefore twofold: (a) to construct and utilize an evaluative instrument for use with any elementary peer support training program; and, (b) to administer the instrument to a group of students who will participate in an elementary peer support training program. It is hoped that this instrument will be useful in the evaluation not only of the training program, but will impact the entire peer support program. Without effective training sessions, peer support programs stand little chance of great success.

The Peer Support Training Evaluation

This research project is aimed at evaluating the training program used in a peer support program in four elementary schools. In order to ascertain whether or not students have improved their communication skills as a result of the training, an instrument (called the Peer Support Training Evaluation, PSTE) was developed which, after appropriate piloting and revision, was later administered as a pre and post test.

The Peer Support Training Evaluation (PSTE) was designed to evaluate generic communication skills (non-theoretical, non-specific practical skills without technical jargon or specific vocabulary). The instrument was developed after analyzing the items from past examinations and experimenting with various item styles. The first part of the test includes 10 items taken from a listening test by Jones and Mohr (1976). The second part is made up of multiple choice items adapted from Carkhuff's (1980) and Gazda's (Gazda, Asbury, Balzer, & Childers, 1984) empathy and communication training scales. The third, open-ended part instructs students to respond to short scenarios with as many written responses as possible and then to choose the single response which they feel best facilitates communication.

The goals of the PSTE are:

1. to provide a means to determine accountability of the elementary peer support program;

2. to provide means to evaluate the elementary peer support training program;
3. to provide means on which to base necessary changes to any peer support training program;
4. to provide means to evaluate changes in students' levels of communication skills and empathic listening skills.

The instrument was piloted in Strathcona County with a grade 5 and a grade 6 class who previously had received no formal communications training. The purpose of the pilot was to gain feedback as to the appropriatness of language and clarity of questions and instructions. Once necessary revisions were completed, the PSTE was administered as a pre-test to 116 grade 5 and 6 students. One half of the group received communication skills training by participating in an elementary peer support training program (trained group), and the other half did not receive training (untrained group). As school counsellor and peer support leader, this author and researcher conducted the training program and administered the pre and post testing of the students in Fort Saskatchewan Elementary School.

All students who participated were given the opportunity to discuss the PSTE and its "answers" at the post test stage. In this way, even students who were not directly involved in training still benefited from the exercise as they had the chance to discuss good communication and listening skills.

The remainder of this study is organized in the following manner: Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical roots and relevant research in the peer support area; Chapter 3 describes a peer support training program utilized in this study; Chapter 4 delineates methods and procedures used in this study; Chapter 5 presents an analysis and interpretation of the data collected; and Chapter 6 offers conclusions from the study and recommendations for future elementary peer support research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

As evidenced by the number of published articles available through the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and the advent of journals and publications devoted exclusively to peer support programs, interest in peer support has become increasingly strong. In order to have a clear understanding of the program, three areas need to be reviewed: (a) the area of the theoretical roots on which peer support is based; (b) the area of research which has been conducted on elementary peer support programs; and (c) the area of research from other levels of peer support programs which is relevant.

Theoretical Roots

The Peer Support Program

The theoretical roots from which peer support emerged are "technically not so much a formal theory as a theoretical position advocated by certain professionals to promote a method for enhancing psychosocial development" (Varenhorst in Brown & Zent, 1984, p. 723). School systems in the late 1960s were criticized for an overemphasis on cognitive content and for not teaching the "whole" child.

Counselling psychologists who supported the criticisms began to advocate new roles and functions for counsellors and psychologists. Psychological services shifted from a reactive, crisis centered orientation to a proactive, preventative orientation. In doing so, services became broader based, reaching far more of the student population. Varenhorst (1983) describes the movement as the beginnings of "psychological education". Students became involved in assisting in the preventative maintenance of mental health in their school and community. The educational system slowly began to address social and psychological as well as intellectual and academic needs of children.

Though its theoretical roots have their beginnings primarily in educational philosophy, the basic constituents of the peer support program are much broader based. The following is a discussion of what many writers consider to be the two most important foundations of the peer support program: the helping and communication processes.

The Helping Process

A basic constituent of the peer support program is the helping process (Varenhorst in Brown & Zent, 1984). In its broadest definition, the helping process refers to one person giving assistance to another person (Gray & Tindle, 1974). Taylor (1989) states that the helping process is an "ongoing series of interactions among elements that results in something different from the original elements" (p.4). In each case, something new is created from the elements, but nothing is ever eliminated or destroyed. Gray and Tindle (1974) state similarly that the helping process is the "composite of all activities associated with the helper helping the helpee" (p.8). They diagrammatically summarize the process with a five step model:

1. The person seeking help communicates a concern, feeling, or problem;
2. the helper receives, integrates, and responds to the need;
3. the helpee perceives and integrates the response and communicates, if necessary, an additional message;
4. the helper again receives and integrates the message; and,
5. using basic communication skills assists the person in need.

In successful helping interactions, the person seeking help is eventually able to solve his own problems with minimal, albeit skillful, intervention by the helper.

Brammer (1973) defines helping as a voluntary process where one person enables another person to grow and mature in the direction that person chooses. The aim of the process is to assist the person seeking help become more responsible and self-sufficient by identifying and utilizing their individual inner strengths and resources. Help may vary from strong physical intervention (suicide prevention), to subtle emotional support (peer support).

According to Carkhuff (1969a), effective helping is not limited to professional helpers, but can be successfully delivered by trained, empathic, lay persons. Some writers (Avila, Combs, Reissman, 1977; Brammer, 1973; Mitchell & Johnson (eds.), 1973) maintain however that certain individuals possess greater natural helping abilities than others, and will have greater success helping others. Generally, these individuals have had more positive life experiences and are better able to enter into the perceptual world of the person they are to help. Though "natural" helpers demonstrate these traits instinctively, they still may improve these skills through training (Carkhuff, 1969a; Carkhuff et al., 1977).

Gazda and his colleagues (1984) maintain that there is no single personality type that has been identified as the helper type, though there are some prerequisites on which those who would be effective helpers can build: "Without these prerequisites it is doubtful that any amount of training will enable one to be truly effective in a helping relationship" (p.7). These characteristics include cognition of the helper's own values, motives, strengths, weaknesses, feelings, purpose in life, and current level of psychological, emotional, and intellectual functioning.

Rogers (1958) drew attention to the desired conditions in a helping relationship. Helpers, according to Rogers, must create a condition of trust, respect, understanding, acceptance, genuineness and caring. They do so by demonstrating unconditional positive regard for the person they are helping, and by utilizing good communication and listening skills. Following the same line of thought, Reissman (1965), states that core conditions of helping are established when during the process the helper is taken out of his own world into the perceptual world of another thus beneficially diminishing concern about himself.

Much of the current literature on helping (Avila, Combs, & Purkey, 1977; Brammer, 1973; Carkhuff, 1969a; Carr, Yanishewski, & deRosenroll, 1989; Carroll & King, 1985; deRosenroll & Dey, 1990; Gazda, et al., 1984; Sciacco, 1990) suggest additional benefits for the helper. They include: increased feelings of worthiness and prestige and new perceptions and awareness of others. Evidence suggests that children experience much the same benefits as adults in the helping process, though they may choose to help for different reasons. For example, they may hope to be accepted as part of a social group, they may want to be better liked, or they may want to fulfill a sense of commitment to others (Brammer, 1988; Carr, 1984).

It seems evident that participation in the helping process may result in positive outcomes for both helper and those being helped. This is a key support for the implementation of a peer support program.

Communication Skills

Central to the helping process is communication. In fact, it is the ability to communicate empathy, genuineness, and trust that seems to identify more "natural" helpers. It is also these skills that researchers in the area of peer support identify as the skills which can be substantially improved by training (Bowman & Myrick, 1980; Carr, 1986; deRosenroll, 1986b).

Many texts exist which extensively describe and delineate the communication process (Bittner, 1988; Okun, 1987; Taylor, Meyer, Rosengrant, & Samples, 1989). Most agree that a "sender" transmits a verbal or non verbal "message" which is then "encoded" or interpreted by the "receiver". The receiver then transmits a message in response to the sender and thus the communication cycle is established.

Any number of stimuli may enhance or interfere with communication. According to Taylor and others (1989), self concept, or the way in which an individual perceives himself, is an important variable in communication. "It develops through communication experiences and in turn strongly influences how we talk and act" (p. 53). Research indicates that a person with a good self concept is likely to have good communication skills (Gumaer, 1976; Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972; Kern & Kirby, 1971).

A second area of importance in communication is the skill of listening. Listening, according to Avila, Combs, & Purkey (1977), may be the most important communication skill in the areas of the helping process and peer support. Research has shown that listening is the communication activity most people do most (Bostrom, 1990) and without doubt the activity that trained peer helpers do most. Most basic to the skill of listening is the ability to hear that which is not being said. Helpers must integrate verbal messages with relevant non-verbal cues, including the ideas and feelings which are left unstated. Feelings, according to Myrick (1987), are most often communicated non-verbally and require a perceptive and empathic listener to identify them.

The difference between empathic listening and other types of listening is intention, rather than technique. Empathy, according to Bittner (1988), is to "enter mentally into the feelings of another person. We cannot casually empathize. We literally transpose ourselves in to the other person's position as a communicator and then develop an awareness of what that person is feeling" (p. 108). Good communication involves giving empathic responses as well. When receivers respond to feeling as well as content, senders feel their message is more clearly heard and understood (Selman, 1980).

Learning to listen empathically is likely the greatest challenge elementary aged peer support helpers face. Some child development theorists believe that children under the age of 10 are developmentally unable to empathize with their peers (Kohlberg in H. Murray Thomas, 1987; Piaget in Duska, 1975). Similarly, Carkhuff (1969a,b), Gazda and others (1984), and Myrick and Bowman (1981) maintain that communication skills training in the elementary school is most effective with children over 10 years of age. Following this line of thought, elementary peer support leaders generally restrict team membership to students in grade 5 and 6 who are, on average, 11 and 12 years of age (Solberg & Whitford, 1988).

It is evident in the literature that, for a variety of reasons, many elementary peer support training programs concentrate on assisting students to develop and improve their communication and empathic listening skills. Two questions arise as a result: (a) do students as a result of elementary peer support training increase their empathic listening and communication skills; and, (b) how can we measure the increase?

The Peer Support Program

Overview

While interest has been shown in peer support, the literature contains more subjective discussions and reviews than objective evaluation (Warner & Scott, 1974). In light of this, the remainder of this review will focus on the peer support program, its definition, history, current status in various educational systems, rationale, and goals, with particular focus on elementary peer support.

Peer Support Defined

As defined in the literature, a peer support program is a program where trained, supervised students listen, support, and offer alternatives (but little or no advice) to other students (Carr, 1980; deRosenroll & Moyer, 1983; Garner, Martin, & Martin, 1989; McCann, 1975; Myrick & Erney, 1979). "Peer Counseling", "Peer

Facilitating", "Peer Helping", "Big Brothers", "Big Sisters", "Buddies", and "Peer Helpers" are but a few of the many titles used synonymously with peer support and peer support team members. There has been much discussion as to the use of the term "counsellor" and "counselling" in conjunction with peer support (Anderson, 1976; Myrick & Bowman, 1981; Gumaer, 1973). Both terms imply a certain level of professionalism and responsibility which is not intended by the participants in the program. Anderson (1976) has reported angry telephone calls from parents asking why their 11 or 12 year old child was expected to take over the school counsellor's roles and responsibilities (Anderson, 1976). Obviously this expectation was never the intent. In one case, the school changed the name of their peer counselling program to the "Buddy Club" which was felt to more clearly reflect the training of the participants and show the intended relationships between peers (Canning, 1983).

A peer support team member or peer helper is a young person in a school who chooses to be trained to use communication skills in order to assist other students to think about ideas and feelings, to explore alternatives to situations, and to make responsible decisions (Campbell, 1983; Canning, 1983; Gumaer, 1973; Myrick & Bowman, 1983). They are seen as caring, sensitive listeners whose aim is to promote personal and academic growth through positive relationships. They often become role models and mentors for the entire school population (Hoffman, 1976).

Throughout the literature, peer helpers have been utilized in one of three ways: (a) being given a specifically defined role, such as to provide orientation to new students, to manage the school store, or to assist office clerical staff, (b) being given a role similar to that of the counsellor, where they provide listening and support to identified students in need, and (c) being given the role of small group leader where they facilitate the exchange of ideas and feelings between group members on a regular basis (Warner & Scott, 1974).

In most school settings, the program is organized and run by the school counsellor with assistance from teachers, parents, or other community members (deRosenroll & Dey, 1990; Myrick & Bowman, 1981). The greatest time committment on the part of trainers occurs during the planning and initiation stages. DeRosenroll (1986a; 1986b) claims that a truly well conceived and organized program will virtually run itself. Many writers have concluded that peer support programs seem to be one of the best methods of organizing and utilizing the resources of students in order to help other students become more successful in the school setting (Carr & Saunders, 1980; Cole, 1987; Myrick & Bowman, 1981; Samuels & Samuels, 1975; Vassos, 1971).

History of Peer Support

As early as 1800, an organized program existed where students were trained to assist other students (Bowman & Myrick, 1980; Anderson, 1976). Though the program focused primarily on academic assistance or "tutoring", it is credited as having given rise to the modern peer support movement.

The majority of peer support programs described in the literature focus on college and university students (Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972; Rapp, 1987; Russel & Thompson, 1987; Warner & Scott, 1974; Woudenberg & Payne, 1978). Many of them began in the early 1960s in college dormitories where student leaders received special training in communication and listening skills, group leadership, and decision making strategies (Campbell, 1987; Myrick & Bowman, 1981). Counsellors and administrators recognized the widespread positive impact of the dormitory programs and increased the scope of the programs to include the whole campus. In their survey of college level peer support studies, Warner and Scott (1974) reported that though the large majority were not truly experimental in nature, studies clearly showed that peer support programs helped improve grade point averages and feelings of self esteem for both those seeking help, and the helpers themselves.

Partially as a result of the success of the college level programs and partially as a method to encounter a rising drug problem, peer support programs were established in high schools. Vriend (1969) published results of a study with high school students who worked with their low achieving peers in counselling groups. Both the helpers and those seeking help demonstrated increased self confidence, academic achievement, and self esteem. Cooker and Cherchia (1976) reported that with as little as eight hours of communication skills training, high school students demonstrated higher levels of communication in a helping situation and better group facilitation skills than did their untrained counterparts.

In a pilot program described by Frank, Ferdinand, and Bailey (1975), special education students were trained and included on a peer support team. Teachers reported an increase in social comfort and a corresponding decrease in feelings of "differentness" among students in the program. MacDonald and McLaughlin (1987) describe a high school program established in the Alberta School for the Deaf. Though they found training the students and the time committment required by leaders to be a challenge, they reported that the program "enriched the school and the student population through improved morale" (p. 125). Like post secondary administrators and counsellors, high school personnel have recognized the powerful impact of the program for all who are involved. Currently many Canadian and American high schools have active peer support programs (Altman, Nysetvold, & Downe, 1986; Carr, 1984; Carr & Saunders, 1980; McIntyre, Thomas, & Borgen, 1982).

More recently, peer support programs have been established in junior high schools. A few studies have been conducted to examine the impact of the program at junior high or middle school levels. Hamburg and Varenhost (1972) ran a peer support program with students in grades 7 through 12. Though they did not use a control group, the self reports of participants indicated the program was successful in academic, personal and social areas. As well, Sharon (1989) conducted a qualitative study with a group of grade 7 students who were lead through a peer support training program. Without exception, all students who completed the training reported (via interview and journal entries) increased feelings of self worth and self esteem.

The movement in the 60s and 70s toward establishing elementary guidance and counselling programs also gave rise to the emergence of peer support in the elementary schools. Pioneers in the field include Mastrionni & Dinkmeyer (1980), Myrick and Bowman (1981), Gumaer (1973), Myrick and Erney (1979), Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972), and Kern and Kirby (1971). Use of Dinkmeyer's (1970) Developing Understanding of Self and Others (DUSO) and Palomares' (1970) Human Development Program (Magic Circle) demonstrated that even students as young as 11 and 12 are able to lead, listen, and offer support for their peers.

A few informal studies in the area of elementary peer support have found the program to be of benefit to all who participate (Goodman, Powell, & Burke, 1989; Hoffman, 1976, McCann, 1975, Gumaer, 1973). Kern and Kirby (1971) conducted the first, and one of the only, experimental studies when they trained a group of grade 5 and 6 students to co-lead discussion groups with their school counsellors. They compared the peer and counsellor co-lead group, a counsellor-only lead group and a no contact control group, and found that the "conjoint group significantly improved the participants' school adjustment behaviors" (p. 74). Stern, Fowler, & Kohler (1988) demonstrated reduction in 2 grade 5 students' disruptive behaviors when the students were appointed as either a peer monitor or point earner. The importance of the study lies in the fact that the students' off-task behavior decreased significantly when they were given the opportunity to work with their peers in a supportive mode. This research again supports the theory that participation in a peer support program can have positive impact on the behavior and feelings of team members.

Rationale

In many schools the ratio between the counsellor and the students is 1:400 or even 1:800 (Myrick, 1987). In larger schools the students might not know the identity or location of the counsellor (Cooker & Cherchia, 1976; Downe, Altman & Nysetvold, 1986). Therefore, it is not surprising that counsellors are often perceived as unavailable, uninterested, or just too busy to see students. In addition, Raiche (1979) reported that students are often reluctant to seek help from a counsellor because of the possible stigma attached to seeking professional psychological help. It is the consensus of many writers that present guidance and counselling programs are inadequate, both in terms of manpower and accessibility, for a significant number of students (Allan, 1978; Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972; Myrick & Bowman, 1981; Raiche, 1979).

Therefore, in the continual search for new ways to reach more students in need of help, many school counsellors have organized peer support programs. Research suggests that peer support can provide one alternative for "meeting adolescents' instructional and social needs within the school and thus aid in humanizing their education" (Edwards, 1976, p. 54).

Adolescents today face a myriad of problems. Divorce, single parenting, remarriage, and reforming of family units are all increasingly common. As a consequence, family structures are undergoing change and frequently lack support and stability for children and adolescents. More incidents of children suffering physical and emotional abuse are reported. Running away, attempting or committing suicide, and experiencing substance abuse problems are ways that adolescents increasingly cope with their problems (Cooker & Cherchia, 1976; deRosenroll, 1986a). According to McCann (1975), "our culture has become increasingly dehumanized and impersonal, resulting in psychological hunger, feelings of aloneness, and rejection of one's real self and feelings" (p. 180).

Even though adolescents are constantly exposed to helpful adults such as parents, teachers, counsellors, or police, they frequently turn to their peers instead.

In an informal study conducted by deRosenroll and Moyer (1983), adolescents reported that they consistently sought out each other for help more than seeking help from the "combined total of parents, counsellors, and other helping agents" (p. 25). Merchant and Zingle (1977) also found that friends were the preferred source of help. Carkhuff (1969a) suggests that young people turn to one another in times of emotional crises because a peer appears to have a greater ability to do the following:

1. enter the milieu of the distressed;
2. establish peer like relations with persons needing help;
3. take an active part in the person's total life situation;
4. empathize more effectively;
5. teach the person, within the person's own frame of reference, more successful action.

A peer can also be the human link between a lonely student and a counsellor who can provide professional help (Bowman & Myrick, 1987).

Research suggests that the peer helper benefits as much, if not more, than those they help. Much has been written about this "training as treatment" phenomenon (Carr, 1980, p. 6). Numerous studies have found that students who participate in the program benefit socially, behaviorally, and academically (Bowman & Myrick, 1987; Canning, 1983; Gumaer, 1978; Myrick & Bowman, 1981; Reissman, 1965). In a study by Cloward (1967), peer facilitators were involved in a tutoring program with their peers. While the reading scores, expressed as age equivalents of the students being tutored, gained six months in reading ability, the scores of the tutors gained three to four years. Other research has shown that both grade point averages and behavioral classroom ratings have improved for peer leaders as well as group participants (Garner, Martin & Martin, 1989). Most of these reports however are anecdotal accounts, and few studies with objective measures have appeared in the literature (Middleton, Zollinger, & Keene, 1986).

Goals of the Program

It is a recurrent theme in the literature that the goal of any peer support program is to promote personal and academic growth through positive relationships. Rockwell and Dustin (1979) suggest four generic goals for any peer support program:

1. To increase counseling program effectiveness by handling routine needs and questions and screen clients to help ensure that clients who see the counselor actually need the counsellor;
2. To increase visibility of the counselling

program;

3. To increase the amount of counselling within a school;
4. To facilitate psychological growth within trainees.

Cole (1987) suggests similar goals as do Gray and Tindle (1974), and Myrick and Bowman (1981).

Peer Support Training and the Elementary Health Curriculum

Helping and communication processes have become recognized as important components in the elementary health program. The Alberta Education Elementary Health Curriculum Guide (1983) states that good health depends upon a combination of factors, including acquiring knowledge and developing skills and attitudes which enhance physical, mental, and social well being. Consequently, each level of the elementary health curriculum must include instruction in communication skills, listening skills, and decision making. Clearly the skills that students learn through participation in the peer support training program enhance those learned in health class. It is a widely held belief that if children are taught and able to practice these skills at an early age, there is a better chance that they will use these skills as adults (Carr, Yanishewski, & deRosenroll, 1989).

The curriculum guide neglects to provide clear, succinct methods to evaluate the prescribed skills. It suggests "observation" as the only means to determine whether or not students understand and can utilize communication and listening skills. Foreseeably, the construction and implementation of an evaluative questionnaire designed to measure communication and listening skills could be very useful as part of the course work in the health curriculum as well as in the peer support program.

Establishing a Peer Support Program in the Elementary School

Many writers and researchers agree that a peer support program must be based on the needs of the school and the students. Several authors (Carr 1986; Cole, 1987; Myrick & Bowman, 1981) stress the importance of conducting a needs survey before any implementation measures begin. Even at the elementary level, the school population should be given an opportunity to state the areas in which they would utilize a peer support team.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), a leader in peer support leader training, states that those individuals who are considering starting a team must also examine their own goals and objectives. They suggest that prospective leaders clearly determine for themselves why they are starting a program and what they believe about strength of group and peer pressure. Priorities must be evaluated and set. Plans for development and implementation of the program should be clearly deliniated. Finally, leaders should also be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as a leader and team member and incorporate these into a training program. Once leaders have dealt with each of theses areas, then, and only then, should they continue implementing the program.

The majority of elementary training manuals state that the next step in the implementation process is to "sell" the program to staff and administrators. It is suggested that the more clear and goal-oriented the program, the greater the likelihood that the program will be well received and supported (Myrick & Bowman, 1981).

The program must then be presented to the students. The large majority of published elementary programs suggest only selecting grade 5 and 6 students for the team. Theoretical support is found with developmental theorists. Kohlberg's (1984) levels of moral development state that the "conventional" stage is reached after age 9. Students begin to conform to the expectations of the social group and are able to begin to empathize with peers. Individuals in this stage become aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which take primacy over individual interests. They are able to "put themselves in the other person's shoes" (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 175). There seems to be a switch from striving for physical pleasure to striving for the psychological pleasure which comes through social approval. "Thus the child recognizes that being helpful and empathic to others will result in approval from authorities and consequent positive feelings about themselves" (Duska, 1975, p. 61). Others, (Gilligan & Murphy, 1979; Selman, 1980) agree that children must at least be 10 years of age before they can begin to empathically respond and communicate to and with others. It is evident that, from a developmental point of view, upper elementary aged students are at an appropriate stage to further their natural empathic listening and communication skills.

Based on the premise that participation in a peer support program benefits the helpers as much as those whom they propose to help, students in some instances have been chosen for the team who have special needs themselves: low grades, poor self concepts, or behavior problems (Mitchum, 1983). Edwards (1976) suggests interviewing teachers in order to obtain the names of potential team members and to identify the main areas (social, instructional, behavioral) in which these potential members are particularly strong or weak. Leaders may find themselves torn between selecting students for the good of the team versus selecting students for the student's own benefit. The decision should be based on the perceived needs of the school and school population.

Students are often involved in the selection procedure, ensuring that selected helpers are seen as helpful by their peers as well as their teachers (Raiche, 1979). Some writers (Bowman, 1986; deRosenroll, 1986b; McCann, 1975) suggest presenting the central concepts of the program to the entire grade 5 and 6 group. Counsellors ask the group to define "peer helper," "trust," and "listening." They explain that peer helpers are individuals with whom the students would feel comfortable discussing personal problems. They then allow students a chance to nominate fellow students whom they believe fulfill the requirements of a good peer helper.

There may be some concern that in spite of every effort by leaders to the contrary, the nomination process may become a popularity contest. McCann (1975) suggests that to minimize the chances that only popular students are nominated, all nomination forms should be kept anonymous and confidential and that student nominations contribute only in part to final selection of the team. It is also beneficial, she states, to conduct informal observational studies where leaders, prior to student nominations, circulate on the playground and in classrooms looking for students who demonstrate natural helping skills.

In some cases, popular students may be the most effective helpers and are very appropriate selections to the team. In a controlled study, Middleton, Zollinger, and Keene (1986) found that socially neglected grade 5 and 6 students who were helped by their popular peers "increased significantly in peer acceptance" (p. 343). Evidently the inclusion of popular students may be advantageous in raising the social status of less popular students whom they assist.

Counsellors and leaders use a variety of final selection techniques. McCann (1975) suggests constructing a class sociogram based on information from the students. Decisions may be based on the number of "votes" each student receives. Other leaders use an interviewing strategy where they ask the students why they want to be on the team, why they think they will be good team members, and what they will do if they experience a conflict in commitments (Bowman & Myrick, 1980). Others ask that students complete an application form and submit a letter of reference from an adult. Parr (1989) developed a questionnaire for use when selecting a team. It was designed to identify those students who possess traits considered necessary for participation on a peer support team. Others do not utilize a selection procedure at all, and accept onto the team every student who demonstrates an interest (Varenhorst, 1974).

At the elementary level, it is commonly agreed that parents must be informed of the parameters of the program and must grant permission for their child to participate (Anderson, 1976; Duncan, 1976; Hoffman, 1976). Some writers suggest hosting a "Parent Night" where the leader, peer helpers, and even former peer helpers meet to discuss the program. As reported in the literature, most parents feel the program is very positive and are pleased with the communication and helping skills training their child receives.

Training

Central to the success of the elementary peer support program is training. The purpose of training is to combine theory and experience into one useable entity (Frank, Ferdinand, & Baily, 1975). Some basic counselling concepts can be taught to young students, "but the coordinators of training programs for peer facilitators should remember that they are not preparing these young people to be counsellors" (Frank, Ferdinand, & Bailey, 1975, p. 224). Students must be allowed the opportunity to put their skills to practice as soon as possible.

There are few published training programs designed for use exclusively with elementary age students. Myrick and Bowman (1981) claim their work Children Helping Children is the "first of its kind" (p. 7). It contains suggestions and a format for building a comprehensive student facilitator program for elementary schools. Gray and Tindle's (1974) is the only other American elementary peer support training manual published to date which is available to the public. Varenhorst's (1974) training manual and guide is available only after trainers have attended her training program. Cole's (1987) Kids Helping Kids elementary peer support training manual is the only Canadian elementary training manual published to date. It is highly acclaimed, and is regarded as one of the best manual for anyone starting an elementary peer support program (deRosenroll, 1990). Most training programs currently operating in elementary schools are therefore an eclectic mix of published programs, theory, group work and original material (Bowman, 1986; Johnson, 1987).

The majority of the published programs suggest training sessions be held for approximately 30 to 45 minutes for 8 to 10 sessions. Elementary students are generally unable to stay after school for any length of time for obvious reasons, so sessions are usually held at noon hours or, in the odd instance, during class.

Bowman and Myrick (1980) suggest leading students through seven "helping phases" during the training sessions:

1. Getting started- students get in touch with their own attitudes and feelings;
2. The nature of helping- students understand the central concepts of the helping process;
3. Feelings- students learn to identify and respond empathically to peer's feelings;
4. Listening- students demonstrate empathic listening skills;
5. Helping responses- students are able to offer appropriate helping strategies;
6. Problem solving- students are able to assist with decision making and problem solving;
7. Other things to remember- mechanics of the program, how to contact clients, where to go, how to refer to an adult if need be.

Raiche (1979) suggests training should comprise four elements:

1. Peer helpers get in touch with their own feelings;
2. Peer helpers are taught basic counselling skills: portraying understanding and caring in a genuine way;
3. Peer helpers are given strategies to help clients make a decision;
4. Peer helpers are provided with continuous inservice to develop skills and discuss cases.

Other programs (Carr & Saunders, 1980; Gray & Tindle, 1974; Varenhorst, 1974) suggest similar formats for training. Most advise to keep sessions short and focused so as not to overwhelm the helpers. They also suggest that training be kept to a total of eight to ten hours and to allow the helper to begin working with their peers as soon as possible. Real learning begins when students are faced with actual clients who are experiencing very real problems.

One or two day "retreats" are becoming increasingly popular with many elementary programs. With parental permission, students are taken to a facility away from the school for a day or two in order to participate in an intensive training session and to build the trust, cohesiveness, and comraderie of the team. The retreat, suggests personnel from AADAC, is probably the most important tool in the entire training program. If such an approach is used, however, it should be considered only part the training program. Several more sessions should be held to help students further personalize the concepts and practice the skills (Bowman, 1986; Mastrionni & Dinkmeyer, 1980).

Topics covered in training programs emphasize communications skills as well as empathic listening. Most have a decision-making model which students must follow. Peer helpers must also be trained to understand the importance of confidentiality, trust, and when a referral to the counsellor is appropriate (Canning, 1983; Paritzky, 1981).

Programs

Peer Support Programs operate in a number of different ways and on a number of different levels (Carr, 1984). As stated previously, it is important that the projects in which peer support teams participate be selected based on the need of each individual school. The following is a brief description of the more popular peer support projects as described in the literature.

Special Friends.

Without doubt, friendship is a major concern for elementary students (Middleton, Zollinger & Keene, 1986). More often than not, a teary-eyed episode in the elementary school is a result of a fight with a best friend or the feeling that the child has no friends. The responsibility of the peer support team member is to provide friendship and unconditional positive regard for any and all students who are feeling lonely (Bowman, 1986; McCann, 1983). Generally this takes place over recesses and noon hours. The peer helper will spend some time playing and talking with the needy student, help them make age appropriate friends, and listen to and accept their feelings for as long as the Peer Helper, the child and the leader deem necessary.

Conflict Management.

Another frequent problem area in any elementary school is that of conflict management, particularly on the playground (Canning, 1983; Cole, 1987). Students often approach the counsellor for assistance with a conflict in which they are involved. Generally the problems are easily and quickly solved, most often by the students themselves. The peer support team is therefore responsible for helping students in conflict to agree upon an acceptable resolution for their dilemma. At no time is a team member required to physically stop a fist fight: that is the responsibility of the cooperating teacher.

Tutoring.

Helpers may be called upon to offer academic assistance to their peers. As stated previously, peer tutoring is the most widely researched of all peer support programs. Tutoring clearly benefits both the tutor, as well as the student seeking tutoring. Some programs allow students to request a peer tutor, while others have teachers identify students whom they believe will benefit from the tutoring program and an appropriate referral is made. In most cases, peer helpers help explain assignments, listen to students read aloud, or proofread writing.

Group Work.

In some peer support programs in the elementary schools, peer helpers lead small group discussions. Kern and Kirby's (1971) study clearly showed that discussion groups which were peer support helper lead showed greater success than those lead by a non peer support student or by an adult counsellor.

Evaluation

Little has been addressed in the literature about evaluation of a peer support program, or the skills of peer support helpers (Carr, Yanishewski, & deRosenroll, 1989; deRosenroll, 1989; Dougherty & Taylor, 1983; Sciacca, 1990; Sze & Hopps, (eds.) 1978). Altman, Nysetvold & Downe (1986) define evaluation in relation to the peer support program as a "feedback loop for change or improvement of the program" (p.86). They contend that most peer support trainers avoid extensive evaluation procedures as they view them as time consuming, boring, expensive, and as requiring a large sampling and sophisticated statistical research and design methods. Though most writers agree that various instruments do exist which are designed to assess these areas, all are targeted for high school or post secondary students.

Raiche (1979) suggests that, at the high school level, students should be given a pre and post test based and rated on the Carkhuff (1969) scale. He also suggests keeping data on number of clients seen, number of sessions per client, attendance, disciplinary office referrals, and incidents of community juvenile delinquency to determine the effectiveness of the program. Dougherty & Taylor (1983) maintain that the pre and post method to measure changes as a result of program is of limited value as increases in scores in pretests and posttests may be a result of student maturation, life experiences or other intervening intervals. It is imperative that research in the area of peer support utilize a control, or untrained group, in order to substantiate findings.

As in other levels, little empirical evidence exists in the area of evaluation of elementary peer support training programs (Carr, Yanishewski, & deRosenroll, 1989; deRosenroll, & Dey, 1990). There is a "lack of documentation of the nature and pattern of learned affective skills and social relationships that develop in the elementary peer support process" (Altman, Nysetvod & Downe, 1986, p. 89). Most leaders have used informal assessments, interviews, and observation to assess the impact of the program. These measures are simply not enough. Clearly there is need of evaluative research in the area of elementary peer support and thus lies the crux of this study.

CHAPTER 3

Training

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to delineate and describe one of the three elementary peer support training programs utilized in this study. The other two programs utilized were similar in both content and format to the following described program. All three emphasized development of communication and empathic listening skills.

Peer Support at Fort Saskatchewan Elementary School

The peer support program first began at Fort Saskatchewan Elementary School (FSE) in February, 1990, and continued until June, 1990. Based upon student, teacher, and parent opinion, the program was deemed a success and was implemented again the following year. The overall procedures, objectives and goals remained ostensibly the same both years.

The Peer Support Training Program at FSE

Early in September, 1990, elementary peer support leaders in the Strathcona County decided, where possible, to combine elementary peer support groups from different schools to conduct the major facet of elementary peer support training, the one day training retreat. Additional training, as deemed necessary, would be carried out in each school.

The majority of the training would be completed during the retreat. Further, more advanced skills training would occur for a period of four to six weeks afterward. Content of the additional sessions would be based on areas in which the peer helpers felt they needed more training.

The peer support team from Fort Saskatchewan Elementary combined with the peer support team from Wye School and met Thursday, January 24, 1991 at the Strathcona Wilderness Center for a day-long training session (see Appendix A). Three trained leaders conducted the training session. Two of the leaders were school counsellors, and one was a grade 2 teacher. All had completed the AADAC Peer Support Trainers' Workshop earlier in the year.

The training consisted of three phases: (a) an introductory or building of group dynamics phase, (b) a communication skills phase, and (c) an elementary counselling skills phase. Resources for the training program included Cole's (1987) Kids Helping Kids, Gray's and Tindle's (1974) "Communication Training Study", AADAC's Peer Support Training Manual, and the wisdom and many years experience of the three trainers.

Group Dynamics

The peer support trainers were aware that the most successful peer support training sessions are those in which the group is cohesive, goal oriented, and able to trust one another (Cole, 1987; Gray & Tindle, 1974; Myrick & Bowman, 1981). Since the groups were from two different schools and had never met one another prior to the retreat, and since time was relatively limited, it was important that the initial "ice breaking" activities could quickly bring the group together, help them get to know and trust one another, and set the stage for the rest of the day. The trainers chose to have the students first participate in a name game. All students were required to stand in a circle, one by one recite their name and state one area in which they excelled. Students were encouraged use their imagination and humor. The stage was indeed set for a fun, task oriented day.

Communication Skills

The students were arbitrarily broken into three groups. Each of the leaders had prepared a 45 minute session on one component of communication skills training. The three sessions were as follows:

Nonverbal Communication.

This session focused on nonverbal communication. Students were lead to understand that the communication process is always nonverbal as well as verbal. Behavior expresses meaning, sometimes more clearly than words. To be an effective communicator, students were taught to focus on both body language and tone of voice. "How" what is being said is often as important as "what" is being said. Students were also given an opportunity to discuss ways to improve their nonverbal communication skills. They noted the importance of good eye contact, speaking clearly and loudly enough to be heard, to match the feelings and expressions of the person they are trying to help, and to keep an appropriate physical distance between themselves and the student to whom they are listening.

The other part of the session focused on empathic listening or, as described by the students, "listening for feelings". People often may indicate how they feel by the tone of their voice in addition to the words they use. When peer support team members listen for feelings, they may wish to say to themselves "Am I hearing happy or upset feelings?". They also must "check in" with the person seeking help to make sure they are correct in their perceptions. It was suggested that team members ask a question like "You feel ______________ because you _______________" and allow the person to validate the observation. In this way, the person knows he has been listened to and understood, and is more likely to feel that the peer support team member is interested and cares about him as a person.

The session culminated with the group breaking into pairs and being assigned a role play to carry out. One person was given a card which described a dilemma he or she currently was experiencing and wished to discuss. The other person practiced listening for feelings and responding in an appropriate manner. The leader circulated among the groups, giving guidance as needed. The pairs were given the opportunity to switch roles and the exercise began again. Finally, the group gathered together to debrief and offer their perspective to the experience.

Questioning and Genuineness.

In this session, students were given an opportunity to discuss and practice good questioning techniques. Questioning goes beyond reflective listening; it enables a person to talk at length about what is bothering him (Cole, 1987). Students were given examples of "open" and "closed" questions. Open questions are asked in a way to help a person to think of an answer and discuss it at length. A closed question is asked in a way that would result in a simple yes or no answer.

Students were asked to group themselves into pairs and role-play a peer support situation. One person was to present a problem, and the other was to ask open questions about the problem. Students then switched roles. The leader circulated and offered assistance when appropriate to do so.

The second half of the session dealt with genuineness, or the ability to express one's feelings about other's behavior in such a way as to maintain the relationship and increase the chance that others will change their behavior. Genuine interchanges frequently lead to better understanding between two people and improve the chances that the problem can be solved (Gray & Tindle, 1974).

In learning to be genuine, students were taught to send "I" messages. They were to be open and honest in a gentle and caring manner with the students they were helping. This skill is especially helpful when peer support helpers must deal with a quiet, uncommunicative child. Helpers are taught to be honest with this type of student and to say something like "I feel frustrated when you won't speak and I don't know how to help you. Could you help me out by telling me what the problem is?". Once again, students were given the opportunity to role-play the skill.

Conflict Management.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges peer support students face is dealing with conflict. Following Cole's (1987) program, students were taught to handle conflict between their peers in the following manner: (a) allow one person and then the other(s) to state their view of the situation, (b) ask each of the students in conflict what solutions they could suggest to remedy the conflict (helpers may offer suggestions like "shake hands" or "take a time-out from one another"), (c) elicit an agreement from the students in conflict that they will resolve the difficulty with the agreed upon strategy.

If the persons in conflict refuse or cannot complete any one of the steps, the helper is to remind them that they either resolve the conflict at that point, or have the principal step in. Most students see the wisdom in solving the conflict on their own. The model allows both parties to retreat in dignity and demonstrates good problem solving methodology.

The leader, with the assistance of two helpers, modeled the conflict resolution skills, then allowed students to role-play. As in the other sessions, the leader circulated and offered assistance where necessary.

Conclusion.

Two of the three sessions were held during the morning, the third was held after a group activity in the afternoon. The final large group session was designed to have the day end on a positive note. All of the peer helpers gathered in a circle and each shared what they had learned from the day and what the highlight was. Finally, the group listened to "Lean on Me", the theme song of the retreat. It was an opportunity to reflect privately on the day's training and on the job ahead. Informal evaluation revealed that all of the participants thought the training experience was very positive and suggested that the group be given an opportunity to meet again, perhaps at a year end picnic.

Follow-up Training

Once the students returned to school, follow-up training sessions were held once a week, for four weeks. These noon hour sessions included further opportunity to practice the skills learned at the retreat, and further instruction in questioning, listening, and paraphrasing. The sessions also allowed instruction in the "mechanics" of the program: (a) how to initially contact a student in need; (b) how to refer a student if necessary, (c) how long to work with any one student; and (d) how to terminate a peer support relationship. The students at this point felt trained and ready, and were eagerly awaiting commencement of the program.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this study was to develop and implement the Peer Support Training Evaluation (PSTE). This chapter identifies the hypothesis and research questions investigated in the study, and describes the sample, instrumentation, procedures, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Research Hypothesis and Questions

The null hypothesis investigated in the course of this study is as follows:

> There will be no significant difference between the pre and post test scores of individuals who participate in an elementary peer support training program.

Stemming from this hypothesis are several research questions in need of attention:

1. Is there any difference between the initial and increase in scores of males and females?
2. Is there any difference between the increase in scores of the three identified behavioral groups: aggressive, solitary, and typical?
3. Is there any difference between the increase in scores of team members who had previously received training and those who were receiving training for

the first time?

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 116 grade 5 and 6 students drawn from four schools in the County of Strathcona Public School System. All students who participated did so voluntarily. Written permission from each participating students' parents was obtained (see Appendix B).

The subjects were divided into 2 groups. Group 1 (trained) consisted of students who were selected to be a part of a peer support team and who attended a peer support training program. Group 2 (untrained) was a group consisting of students who were not a part of a team and who did not receive any formal skills training. Group 2 subjects were matched with Group 1 subjects by age, grade, sex, school, and personality type. Personality type was determined by presenting each students' home room teachers with a list of behavioral characteristics which described three personality types (see Appendix C). Based on their observations and knowledge of the students, teachers rated each participant as either an "aggressive", "solitary", or "typical" personality type.

All students were guaranteed anonymity and that their responses would be kept confidential.

Instrumentation

The Peer Support Training Evaluation (PSTE) was developed for this study and tested in a pilot study. It contains 22 items: 10 multiple choice items which measure empathic listening skills, 10 multiple choice items which measure empathic response skills, and 2 open ended items which measure problem solving skills.

The PSTE was derived from 2 sources. The listening items were taken verbatim from The Jones Mohr Listening Test (1976). Two grade 5 and two grade 6 teachers from Strathcona County agreed to meet and select 10 questions from the original test which they felt were at a level appropriate for grade 5 and 6 students. Five of the selections focus on positive feelings, and five focus on negative feelings. As prescribed in the original test, students listened to a tape recorded reading of the opening statement of each question and then were required to select the adjective or phrase which best described the speaker's underlying emotion or message.

The second source utilized for the instrument was the "Scale for Global Ratings of Responding" by Gazda and his associates (1984). Each of the 4 alternatives presented as possible responses to each of the presented situations represented a different level of global communication. Gazda outlines the characteristics of each level in the following table:

Table 1

Summary of Gazda's (1974) Scale for Global Ratings of Responding

Level	Key Word	Helper actions characterized by	Helper's goal
1	Harmful	Criticism	Inappropriate; to gratify self by dominating helpee
2	Ineffective	Unsuitable advice	Inappropriate; stated goal to help; real goal is to be important in the eyes of the helpee
3	Facilitative	Relationship building	To earn the right to help
4	Additive	Problem solving	To help

Students were required to identify the "best" response which, according to Gazda, was representative of a level 4 response. This portion of the test, as well as the final open ended section, was completed at each student's own reading and writing pace.

Gazda's scale was also used in the construction and evaluation of the open ended questions. Each of the situations described in the two open ended questions were phrased in a way which would allow students to offer a variety of responses which would then be rated according to level. In reviewing the levels with the grade 5 and 6 teachers, it was agreed that students should have been able to attain at least a level 3 in their open ended responses once they had received communication skills training.

Procedure

Approval to conduct the study was granted from the Department of Educational Psychology Research and Ethics Committee, Mr. G. Welch, Superintendent of Schools, Strathcona County, and all principals, teachers and parents of students who were involved in the study.

Approximately 2 weeks prior to commencement of the peer support training programs, peer support trainers were given a packet of information which provided guidelines and instructions for administering the PSTE (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was then completed by both groups of students in all participating schools.

Approximately 5 weeks after the peer support teams had completed the one day retreat and majority of follow-up training, the PSTE was readministered to the same group of students. Results were returned and analyzed.

Delimitations of the Study

The sample utilized in this study is limited to students who have been selected to a peer support team, thus the sample is not random and generalizations of the results are only valid for groups similar to the sample. In addition, there was no attempt to balance the number of males and females on the team but rather, students were selected who demonstrated the skills and qualities deemed necessary to become a team member. As a result, there are many more females on each of the peer support teams than males.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the students selected to peer support teams are weak in written language skills. Their scores on a written test may not reflect gains they have made as a result of participation in the program. Secondly, some students are selected to a team because they consistently display superior communication and listening skills. It is likely they will score well on the pre-test and their skills will show little improvement.

These factors do not invalidate the study, however caution has been used in generating conclusions.

CHAPTER 5

Statistical Design and Results

Overview

The purpose of this study, as described in the previous chapter, was to design and implement an instrument called the Peer Support Training Evaluation (PSTE) which would measure improvement in listening and communication skills of peer support team members at the elementary school level. This chapter reviews the statistical design and results of the study and is divided into five sections: (a) a discussion of the demographic data of the experimental group; (b) a discussion of the item analysis and reliability and validity of the questionnaire, (c) a discussion of statistical procedures utilized in the study and the ensuing results, (d) a discussion of the posed hypothesis and research questions, and (e) presentation of three case studies which lend pertinent observations and information to the central issues in this study.

Demographic Data

The sample utilized in this study consisted of a total of 116 grade 5 and grade 6 students drawn from four schools in the County of Strathcona. All of the students had been selected to a peer support team in their school by way of peer, teacher, and school nomination. Certain further demographic data appear in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2

Characteristics of the Sample Utilized in the Peer Support Training Evaluation by Sex and Grade

	Grade 5	Grade 6	Total
Males	4	12	16
Females	14	28	42
Total	18	40	58

Table 3

Characteristics of the Sample Utilized in the Peer Support Training Evaluation by Sex, Grade, and Years of Peer Support Experience

	Grade 5		Grade 6		Total
	0 Yrs.	1 Yr.	0 Yrs.	1 Yr.	
Males	4	0	11	1	16
Females	14	0	17	11	42
Total	18	0	28	12	58

Table 4

Characteristics of the Sample Utilized in the Peer Support Training Evaluation by Sex, Grade, and and Personality Type

	Grade 5			Grade 6		
	Aggr.	Loners	Typ.	Aggr.	Loners	Typ.
Males	0	0	4	1	3	8
Females	1	3	10	0	2	26
Total	1	3	14	1	5	34

Treatment of the Data

All collected data were processed and computer analyzed at CRAME at the University of Alberta. Various statistical procedures were used to conduct the item analysis, test the hypothesis and answer research questions. The item analysis and multiple choice questions of the evaluation were scored and T-tests and basic descriptive statistics were computed primarily using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-Revised (SPSSX), and the Lertap program. Interaction was calculated by use of the UANOVA program, also at CRAME.

The Elementary Peer Support Training Evaluation: Item Analysis

The PSTE consists of 22 questions. Items 1 to 10 were taken verbatim from the Jones-Mohr Listening Test (1974). Items 11 to 20 were based on the work of Gazda and his associates (1984) as were the final 2 open-ended items. An item analysis was conducted to measure reliability and validity of each question. The analysis in its entirety appears in Appendix D. Table 5 presents an analysis of the correct answers for the pre test, Table 6 for the post test.

Table 5

Item Analysis of the Elementary Peer Support Training Evaluation: Pre-Test Correct Answers

Item	Option	N	Point Biserial	Means
1	4	77	0.81	12.23
2	2	47	0.24	12.72
3	2	81	0.26	12.37
4	4	72	0.15	12.21
5	4	70	0.38	12.76
6	1	104	0.25	12.11
7	3	71	0.34	12.65
8	4	52	0.26	12.69
9	2	39	0.13	12.38
10	3	28	0.07	12.21
11	3	83	0.50	12.78
12	4	81	0.48	12.79
13	1	74	0.35	12.62
14	2	45	0.26	12.82
15	3	62	0.31	12.71
16	2	60	0.34	12.83
17	1	74	0.49	12.93
18	2	88	0.38	12.49
19	3	86	0.44	12.62
20	4	82	0.48	12.77

Table 6

Item Analysis of the Elementary Peer Support Training Evaluation: Post Test Correct Answers

Item	Option	N	Point Biserial	Means
1	4	69	0.13	12.54
2	2	74	0.24	12.74
3	2	77	0.25	12.74
4	4	81	0.13	12.46
5	4	87	0.18	12.52
6	1	103	0.24	12.47
7	3	81	0.22	12.64
8	4	63	0.22	12.81
9	2	47	0.27	13.71
10	3	30	0.11	12.77
11	3	89	0.54	13.08
12	4	81	0.44	13.06
13	1	64	0.31	13.03
14	2	28	0.40	14.29
15	3	57	0.50	13.70
16	2	63	0.32	13.08
17	1	72	0.41	13.14
18	2	84	0.42	12.98
19	3	89	0.50	13.01
20	4	78	0.46	13.15

Results of the item analysis reveal that all items are functioning well. Point biserial correlates indicate that with the exception of one, there are no dysfunctional foils. The one foil which was not chosen by any of the students was response 2 in item 6 on the pre test. The statement, as read aloud, is "Nothing has gone right today". The foil, or incorrect response, which was not chosen by any of the students was "but I'm looking forward to tomorrow". The speaker's voice clearly depicts a negative, or depressed attitude. The phrase "but I'm looking forward to tomorrow" may have been too positive for the students to see as being a good description of the speaker's underlying thoughts or emotions. On the post test, 2 students chose the response. Should revisions of the PSTE take place, it may be of advantage to remove this question altogether, or revise the foil to read in a less positive manner.

Reliability

Internal consistency information was obtained using the Lertap program which generated Hoyt's Estimate of Reliability. Hoyt's Estimate of Reliability is said to generate the same or similar levels of reliability as the more commonly used Kuder-Richardson 20 Estimate of Reliability (Glass, 1984). Results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Measurement of Reliability of Pre, Post and Combined Test Results as Calculated by Hoyt's Estimate of Reliability

Test	df	r
Pre	115	.52
Post	115	.52
Combined	115	.70

Somewhat low estimates of reliability (.52) on both the pre and post test are of some concern. This may be explained however by the fact that the multiple choice section of the PSTE is in fact two subtests within one. Split-half reliability is calculated on the premise that the entire test is a continuous measure of a given variable. The PSTE is not a continuous measure as it has two distinct foci: empathic listening and communication skills. Test-retest reliability is at an acceptable level (.70).

Validity

Two types of validity were investigated: (a) content validity, and (b) construct validity.

Content Validity. "Content validity is the degree to which the sample of test items represents the content that the test is designed to measure"

(Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 276). This type of validity is not expressed as a correlation coefficient, but rather is usually "appraised by an objective comparison of the test items with curriculum content" (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 276).

In the case of the PSTE, each of the four counsellors who administered the questionnaire agreed that the content of each of the questions clearly measured one or more of the concepts that their peer support training programs would address. It was also acknowledged that, in their professional judgement, the content of most elementary peer support training programs would aim to teach empathic listening and communication skills. Therefore, the PSTE was deemed to have an acceptable level of content validity.

Construct Validity. "Construct validity is the extent to which a particular test can be shown to measure a hypothetical construct" (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 280). The hypothetical constructs measured in this study are empathic listening and communication skills. Statistical evidence and case studies presented later in this chapter suggest that the PSTE does measure the hypothetical constructs it purports to measure.

Open Ended Questions

As discussed previously, the open ended questions were scored by two trained markers (see Appendix E). A total of 10 reliability checks yielded 100% accuracy. This high level reliability between the two markers is not surprising for two reasons: (a) the markers have taught school together for a number of years and have developed similar teaching and marking styles and philosophies, and (b) most of the answers the students provided were very clearly either a level "0", "1", "2", or "3".

Item analysis of the open ended questions yielded the following results:

Table 8

Easiness Percentages and Discrimination Indexes of Open Ended Questions in The Peer Support Training Evaluation

Question	Easiness Percentage	Discrimination Index
1	.40	.30
2	.35	.31

A second item analysis of the open ended questions was conducted as no students received a grade of "4" on either of the open ended questions. As delineated in the literature, this was not an unusual occurence. Level 4 answers require demonstrating "a willingness to help and accurately perceive and respond to the helpee's underlying feelings" (Gazda et al., 1984, p. 124). This level of response also offers problem solving dimensions which helps move the helpee from a feeling of vagueness to one of clarity. Developmental theorists believe that children over the age of 10 are just beginning to be able to empathize with their peers (Kohlberg in H. Murray Thomas, 1987; Piaget in Duska, 1975; Selam, 1980). It is not surprising that their hand written responses offered in a test-like atmosphere would not reach level 4 criteria. The highest grade any student received was "3" thereby changing the values of the Easiness Percentage and Discrimination Index. The revised analysis appears in Table 9.

Table 9

Revised Easiness Percentages and Discrimination Indexes of Open-Ended Questions on the Peer Support Training Evaluation

Question	Easiness Percentage	Discrimination Index
1	.53	.40
2	.47	.41

Both analyses reveal acceptable levels of discrimination for the open-ended questions on the PSTE.

Results of the Study

The means, standard deviations and standard errors of measurement for both pre and post tests are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Means, Standard Deviations, and Standard Errors of Measurement of the Pre and Post Test Score Means of The Peer Support Training Evaluation

	Pre Test			Post Test		
Group	Mean	SD	SEM	Mean	SD	SEM
Untrai.	13.4	3.5	.47	13.7	3.1	.41
Trained	15.4	2.6	.34	16.6	3.5	.46

T-test Results

The significance level was set a .01 and the results indicate a significant difference in pre and post test score means of the trained group, t = 3.09 (n = 58, df = 57, p = .0015, one-tail), and no significant difference in pre and post test score means of the control group, t = .69 (n = 58, df = 57, p = .245). Table 11 presents results of the T-tests.

Table 11

T-test Values for the Differences Between Pre and Post test Score Means of the Trained and Untrained Groups on The Peer Support Training Evaluation

Group	T Value	DF	Sig
Untrai.	0.69	57	
Trained	3.09	57	**

n= 58 **p < .01

Interaction

Of some concern was the initial difference in means between the two groups (1.93). It was felt this was indicative of a lack of homogeneity between the two groups and any significant results may not be legitimately generalizable. Interaction effects were therefore investigated.

Results of multiple comparisons reveal an ordinal interaction (p= .0822, p< .05) exists between the untrained and trained groups. That is "the rank order of the categories of one factor on the basis of their dependent variable scores is the same within each level of the second independent variable" (Glass, 1984, p. 408).

This ordinal interaction was not a surprising outcome. The trained group was comprised of students who had previously exhibited some skill level in the areas evaluated by the PSTE. It therefore is logical that they would score somewhat higher on the initial test. In addition, some of the students, as second year peer support team members, had already received training and as a result scored much higher on the pre test than did their untrained counterparts.

Because the PSTE was designed to be used exclusively with elementary peer support team members, generalizability of the results to the general population is not a critical issue.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there would be no difference between the pre and post test scores of individuals who participated in an elementary peer support training program.

This hypothesis was rejected at the $p < .01$ level as there was a significant difference between the pre and post test scores of these individuals, $t = 3.09$ ($n = 58$, $df = 57$, $p = .0015$, one-tailed).

Research Questions

The following investigations were posed as research questions rather than hypotheses as many of the groups in question had only 1 or 2 members, or extremely unequal membership n's. These very small or unequal n's disallowed rigid statistical procedures.

thus basic descriptive statistics were utilized. Conclusions drawn from these questions must be cautious at best.

Research Question 1. Is there any difference between the initial and increase in scores of males and females?

Interestingly, as outlined in Table 12, the males' scores increased much more than the females. It is important to note that the males' pre test mean was lower than the females', with both achieving similar post test means, and there were less than half as many males as females. A cautiously drawn conclusion may be that males enter training with lower skill levels than females, but after training appear to have increased their skill levels to the level of the females. A great deal of further study would be needed to support this tenuous conclusion.

Table 12

Differences in Pre and Post Test Score Means Of Males and Females on The Peer Support Training Evaluation

Group	N	Mean- Pre	Mean- Post	Difference
Males	16	14.6	16.9	2.3
Females	42	15.6	16.4	0.8

Research Question 2. Is there any difference between the increase in scores of the three identified behavioral groups: aggressive, solitary, and typical?

As presented in Table 13, there is no evidence to support the theory that training benefits aggressive or solitary children more than it benefits typical children. However, these results are based on extremely small n's. More research in this area is warranted.

Table 13

Differences in Pre and Post Test Score Means Of Aggressive vs. Loner vs. Typical Personality Types on The Peer Support Training Evaluation

Group	N	Mean- Pre	Mean- Post	Difference
Aggr.	2	14.0	14.0	0.0
Loners	8	15.0	14.5	-0.5
Typicals	48	15.4	17.0	2.4

Research Question 3. Is there any difference between the increase in scores of team members who had previously received training and those who were receiving it for the first time?

Results as shown in Table 14 indicate that the mean scores of students who had previously received training increased more than those who had not. This may be indicative of a number of factors. First, those who had had training in the previous year had been exposed to the techniques, skill training and jargon of peer support training. They may have been more able to absorb and understand the skills training they received in their peer support training. Second, most of the students who had not received training were also grade 5 students and as such were not as academically experienced as the grade 6 students. Third, there were more than triple the number of non-previously trained students as previously trained students. This alone may account for the difference in scores.

Table 14

Differences in Pre and Post Test Score Means of Non Previously Trained vs. Previously Trained Peer Support Team Members on the Peer Support Training Evaluation

Group	N	Mean- Pre	Mean- Post	Difference
No Tra.	46	15.00	16.30	1.3
Trained	12	16.35	18.45	2.1

Conclusions

Results from this study indicate that the Peer Support Training Evaluation is statistically an acceptable document, and that participation in an elementary peer support training program results in an increase of empathic listening and communication skill level.

Case Studies

Statistics often do not tell the entire story. In fact, quantitative methods in the social sciences have, in some instances, been found to be lacking in addressing the human aspect fundamental to much research in this area (Colazzi, 1978; Sullivan, 1984). Thus, this chapter will close with descriptions, as observed by this researcher, of the experiences of three students who participated in one of the peer support training programs examined in this study. The intent of inclusion of these "case studies" is to lend further and perhaps more emotional evidence to the impact participation in this program had on the students involved.

Matthew

Matthew is an 11 year old boy who currently is enrolled in a special learning assistance class. He has been diagnosed as severely learning disabled, particularly in receptive language processing skills. He is a short, stocky boy who wears rather thick corrective lenses. He speaks with a noticeable stutter.

In a class sociogram conducted in late 1990, Matthew was viewed by his peers as being a "nice, friendly person", though not overwhelmingly popular. Matt was also seen as being "trustworthy", and "a good listener". His teacher also noted that though he was a student to whom other students turned for advice or reassurance, he was rarely invited to birthday parties or sleep-overs. His teacher nominated him for the team primarily because of his natural helping capabilities, that she hoped that membership on the team would help him become more socially accepted. For these reasons, and for the fact that he volunteered and supplied two letters of reference upon applying, Matthew was accepted as a member of the peer support team. He was elated when it was announced over the school's public address system that he had made the team.

Matthew's elation however was shortlived. His poor language skills created tremendous difficulty for him during the training sessions. He was unable to complete many of the worksheets, and those he did complete were virtually illegible. During the training sessions he became increasingly intimidated by his peers who seemed to effortlessly fill in worksheets and to understand every exercise. It seemed that being a peer support team member was going to be as frustrating and overwhelming as coping in a regular class setting.

Noting his increasing despondency, two of his fellow team members approached the team leader. They wondered what they could do to help Matthew with his feelings of inadequacy. The leader suggested a special team meeting to allow everyone to discuss their feelings in regard to being a team member.

The special meeting proved to be very beneficial for not only Matthew, but for a number of team members. As the children shared their feelings, Matthew began to see that he was not alone in his feelings of inadequacy and that, in fact, other team members regarded him as being one of the most skilled helpers. Two or three members cited instances where he had really helped another child in the school. All of the students admitted that they knew that Matt had difficulties with the worksheets, but they did not regard the difficulty as an impediment to his helping skills.

As a result of the support of his peers, Matthew felt much more positive about being a peer helper. Currently is an active and vital member of the team. His teachers and parents have commented that he has never been happier and more confident. His school work has improved and he has every intention of continuing next year as a peer support team member. He has stated that he hopes that "some other kids who are learning disabled make the team because it makes you feel like you can do something right".

Roger

Roger is a 12 year old grade 6 student who is quite proud of his reputation as a tough kid. He is the student who can never stand in line without pushing, can never walk by another student without punching them or pulling their hair, and never misses an opportunity to participate in an after school fight. He is an average student who, in spite of his aggressiveness, is still well liked by his peers. He is feared by the younger students in the school.

Roger was included on the team as it was believed that he would be able to handle conflicts very well. His parents, teachers, and the team leader all agreed that Roger himself would probably benefit from trying to solve some dilemmas, rather than participate in them.

Training proved to be difficult for Roger. He was adamant that the children should just be allowed to "duke it out" with each other and that his role should be to decide who won. Semantics were very important with him. Initially a mistake was made in labeling the conflict manager a "referee". For Roger, this meant a boxing ring and supported his prescribed "letting them duke it out" methodology. When his role was relabeled "conflict manager", he began to understand what he was truly meant to do. Once he grasped the method and was witness to the excellent outcomes which resulted, he became the most sought after conflict manager.

To date, Roger still at times has difficulty in line-ups and at the water fountain. Since completing training however, he has not once been involved in an altercation after school except as a conflict manager. Without losing his toughness, he has managed to control and change his behavior. Like Matthew, he has stated that he would like to continue next year as a peer support team member.

Lisa

Lisa is a very petite 11 year old girl who generally is very quiet and hard working. Because of her diminutive size, she is often mistaken as being a much younger girl and rarely is given an opportunity to take on much responsibility. The peer support leader felt that Lisa's hard working and positive attitude would benefit the team, and that she would benefit from having to accept some responsibility.

Lisa did very well during training. She seemed to be a natural at listening and communicating. By the end of the training sessions she was volunteering to role play in front of the entire group. She also demonstrated an ability to critique other peer support team member's work, and offer excellent suggestions for improvement.

Lisa's teacher has noted that Lisa takes charge much more frequently and readily accepts responsibility. She will be an excellent second year team member and leader.

Conclusions

It is apparent that peer support programs can have positive impact on the students who participate as team members. As presented in this study, this finding is supported by both empirical data and observation. It is hoped that the program will continue to grow and flourish with further research and study.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Observations

This study represents an attempt to establish findings that upper elementary aged children, with communication skills training, are able to increase their levels of empathic listening and communication. Given this objective, the Peer Support Training Evaluation (PSTE) was designed and administered as a pre and post test to 116 grade 5 and 6 students in Strathcona County. One half of the group of students volunteered, were selected to a peer support team, and were then trained in empathic listening and communication skills. The other half of the group was not selected to a team and were, therefore, untrained.

Item analysis of the PSTE revealed acceptable levels of reliability and validity. The instrument is deemed to be a good measure of the criteria it aims to measure.

Statistical analysis of pre and post test score means indicated a significant difference between the means of the trained group, and no significant difference between the means of the untrained group. There was evidence of an ordinal interaction between the means of the two groups however, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the general population. The interaction is not a critical concern as findings were never intended to be generalized to a population other than elementary peer support team members.

The implications of these findings are twofold: (a) it appears that children as young as age 10, 11, or 12, are able to improve their empathic listening and communication skills as a result of participating in an elementary peer support training program; and (b) because of the positive nature of these findings, that peer support programs at the elementary level should continue to be supported and funded.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following are recommendations for further research in line with this study.

1. One trainer suggested that the PSTE could be used as a means to select students to a team. The score they receive on the test could be part of the criteria used to determine team members. Research could be conducted into the predictive validity of the PSTE.
2. The voices the students heard for the first part of the PSTE were adult voices. There would be merit in providing a listening test for children using children's voices.
3. In retrospect, asking grade 5 and 6 students to list as many answers as they can, as was done in

the open-ended portion of the PSTE, was inappropriate. Some students saw fit to write down "kill him", or "send Freddy Krueger after him". The instructions should have read "write down the most helpful statement(s) you could make to this person". This would alleviate the difficulty.

4. There would be merit in generalizing this study to the general population of grade 5 and 6 students. One might address the issue as to whether certain students have an aptitude for listening and communication skills. The results of this study, as stated previously, are limited in their applicability.

The Peer Support Program at Fort Saskatchewan Elementary: Some Observations

The Program of Studies from Alberta Education (1987) states that, among others, the goals of elementary education are to encourage the development of self discipline, self understanding and a positive self concept, to instill a sense of purpose in life and ethical and spiritual values, and to develop and acquire desireable social skills, attitudes and committments towards themselves, their peers, and the world as they know it. The Program of Studies also states that the school is obligated, in harmony with other institutions, to assist students to develop ethical/moral characteristics such as respectfullness, responsibility, fairness, honesty, kindness, loyalty, and forgiveness; and social/personal characteristics of cooperation, acceptance, perseverence, unselfishness, and self worth. The peer support program for both those who are team members and for those who seek help, provides an excellent means for students to develop those characteristics in all of the prescribed areas. For this reason alone, the program deserves recognition and support.

At Fort Saskatchewan Elementary School, the peer support program not only contributes to the development of the skills and attributes as outlined by the Alberta Education Program of Studies, but contributes to the goals and objectives of the school as well.

Early in 1989, school administrative personnel examined the results of an annual survey conducted by the County of Strathcona. Each school in the County received input from parents, staff, and students as to the effectiveness, efficiency, and atmosphere of the school. Outcomes of the survey revealed that both students and their teachers felt that the students of the school did not socialize well, in fact, they did not like each other at all. Senior administrators decided that a major school objective for the following school year would be to assist students to develop their socialization skills and, in doing so, raise students' level of self esteem and self worth.

In the 1989-90 school year, with the above goals in mind, the school counsellor established a peer support team known as "The Buddy Squad". As a result, students in the school had fellow students to whom they could turn for listening and support, and who acted as role models and school leaders. Over one hundred students sought and received help that first year. The program has continued in the school with equal success.

Not surprisingly, the 1990-91 survey revealed that students felt much better about each other and, in turn, about themselves. The peer support program became a permanent fixture at Fort Elementary.

Other benefits have become apparent as the program continues to function. Much to the delight of the counsellor, more students have been given the opportunity to be heard and helped than ever before. The school now has a group of 14 trained students who are able to perform duties as a group in addition to their individual responsibilities. Recently, the Buddy Squad was asked to help with the primary grades' Track and Field Meet, to write and perform a skit about the "Golden Garbage Can Award", and to help the Parents' Group with a hot dog lunch day. Sometimes referred to as the "Super 14", our Squad continues to amaze us with their positive attitudes and unending energy. They are shining examples of kids who care.

Future Directions

Although peer support programs are currently very popular, much needs to be done to ensure their future existence.

Of primary importance is that of evaluation. Though most leaders recognize the importance of evaluation, they do not have the skills or models to do extensive or elaborate evaluation. Much can be done in this area. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to measure the long term impact of the program, particularly on those who participate. What kind of marriage partners, parents, business associates or community members will former peer support team members make? Obviously, instruments and methodologies will need to be developed to conduct this type of research. Other areas in need of attention are: (a) development of philosophical and ethical guidelines for the program as a whole; (b) establishment of more training programs, guides, and materials, particularly at the elementary level; and (c) sharing of research results with the public to increase awareness and acceptance of the program.

In the future, this researcher has visions of those individuals who were trained in peer support programs in their childhood better able to exhibit effective communication and listening skills in their adulthood. The encouraging results of this study could be the beginnings of making those visions, a reality.

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Appendix A

Elementary Peer Support Retreat Schedule

1991 Elementary Peer Support Retreat
"Lean On Me"

Place: Strathcona Wilderness Center
Date: Thursday, January 24, 1991
Time: 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Agenda

Time	Activity	Trainer(s)
9:00 - 9:30	Arrival	
	Group Warm-Up	Linda
	Introduction to Agenda	Deb
	Expectations	Elaine
9:30 - 10:15	Session 1	
10:15 - 10:30	Nutrition Break	
	Juice, Cookies	
10:30 - 11:15	Session 2	
11:15 - 11:30	Debrief	Deb
	Morning Closure	
11:30 - 12:15	Lunch	
	Free Time	
12:15 - 12:30	Group Warm-Up	Elaine
12:30 - 1:15	Session 3	
1:15 - 1:30	Nutrition Break	
	Juice, Cookies	
1:30 - 2:00	Mechanics of Program	All
	Group Session	
	Question Period	
2:00 - 2:15	Debrief	
	What Did I Learn Today?	Linda
2:15 - 2:30	Group Dynamics/ Relaxation	
	Certificate Presentation	All
2:30	Return to School	

Skills Sessions-- Elementary Peer Support Retreat

Session 1

Attending- Non-verbal communication
Listening

Empathy- Paraphrasing and identifying feelings

Summarizing- Summing up what the problem is

Session 2

Questioning- Open and closed questions

Genuineness- Letting them know you care

Session 3

Confrontation- Conflict Management

Problem Solving- Helping them to come to a solution

Appendix B

Letter of Permission to Parents

January 21, 1991

Dear Parents:

Listening and communication skills are an important part of your child's education. Therefore, with your permission, I will be asking your child to fill out a questionnaire which will help me determine at what level children currently listen and communicate and how best to teach listening and communication skills. I will be using part of the questionnaire to help strengthen our Peer Support Program, and part of the questionnaire for work on my Masters of Education thesis from the University of Alberta.

The questionnaire will require approximately thirty minutes of your son's or daughter's time and will be administered at school in late January and then again in late February. Your child's principal and teacher have granted full permission for the study. I will be coordinating the actual administration of the questionnaire. Participation is voluntary, and no names are required; consequently all responses are anonymous and confidential.

The project has also been approved by the Ethics Review Committee at the University of Alberta, Department of Educational Psychology, and the School Board, in addition to the school. I hope that you will give permission for your daughter or son to participate. I am excited about the use of the results to better understand how students relate to and help each other. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to call me at school (998-7771), or at home (464-0568), at any time. Thankyou.

Sincerely,

Mrs. D. Weir
School Counsellor
Fort Saskatchewan Elementary

I give my permission for ________________________ to participate in the study on Peer Support coordinated by Mrs. Weir.

________________________ (parent's signature)

________________________ (date)

Please have your child return this permission slip to Mrs. Weir at your earliest convenience.

Appendix C

Peer Support Training Evaluation

Guidelines for Administering the Peer Support Training Evaluation

1. Explain to the students that the reason they are writing this questionnaire is to see how their listening and communication skills are. You may wish to discuss the importance of good listening and communication skills once the questionnaire is completed.

2. Hand out the Elementary Peer Support Training Evaluation booklets. Ask students to refrain from looking through the booklet.

3. Have the students write their assigned identification numbers on the front of the booklet. Turn to page 1.

4. Read the introductory instructions aloud. Allow students to ask for clarification if needed. Feel free to offer further explanation if warranted.

5. Ask students to circle the appropriate information on page 1.

6. Have all students turn to page 2. Read instructions aloud. Ask if there are any questions. Begin audio cassette recording. Should any students fall behind, stop the recording and let students catch up. Turn tape player off at the end of this section.

7. Have all students turn to page 4. Read the instructions aloud to the class. Please do not do any of the questions as "examples". Each student must complete the entire questionnaire on his own. Ask students to put their pencils down when they have completed the section and to await further instruction.

8. Once all students have finished section II, read the instructions aloud for section III. Again, please do not do any of the questions as an example. Remind students to identify their best response by circling it.

9. Once finished, ask students to check that their identification number is on the front of the booklet and to turn in the entire questionnaire.

Materials Required for The Elementary Peer Support Training Evaluation

1. One copy of The Elementary Peer Support Training Evaluation per student.
2. One pencil for each student.
3. One cassette tape recorder.
4. One copy of the shortened version of the Jones Mohr Listening Test (cassette tape).
5. One Data Record sheet.

Completion of the Data Record Sheet

1. List all students' names on the provided Data Record Sheet. Their identification number is directly to the left of their name.

2. Indicate whether they are peer support team members (PS) or not (NPS) in the next column.

3. Indicate in which subgroup you feel they belong in the last column.

4. When students are handed their booklets, please ask them to record their identification number on the cover.

5. Please include the Data Record Sheet with the questionnaire booklets when they are returned.

Identification of Subgroups

For purposes of this research, I would like to examine the results of certain "subgroups". Following is a list of identifying traits for each of three subgroups: 1. Aggressive "Bullies"; 2. Disassociated "Loners"; and 3. Average or "Typical" students.

1. Bullies
- consistently demonstrate aggressive behavior toward other children;
- are considered to be "tough" by their peers;
- have been involved in physical altercations with their peers;
- may be loud and boisterous, but not necessarily;
- may be a leader, but not necessarily;
- sometimes feared and/or revered by peers.

2. Loners
- consistently are alone on the playground;
- seem to prefer to keep to themselves- may or may not be satisfied with this situation;
- seems to have few friends;
- may prefer to work alone;
- may be quiet and withdrawn, but not necessarily;
- somewhat of an enigma to peers and adults.

3. Typical
- seems to be relatively content with life;
- has friends, socializes appropriately;
- average to above average achievement in school;
- generally well liked by peers and adults.

Source: Dinkmeyer, McKay, & Dinkmeyer, 1980.

Peer Support Training Evaluation

Student Number:_____

Thankyou for agreeing to write this test. As your teacher or counsellor has explained, the purpose of this test is to find out how your listening and communication skills are. It is most important that you listen carefully to the instructions, ask if you don't understand something, and try your best.

Please do not put your name on any of the sheets. Your answers will not be read by anyone at the school except your counsellor. Good luck!

1. Please circle the correct information

   Age: 9 10 11 12 13 14

2. Grade: 5 6

3. Sex: Male Female

4. School: James Mowatt Fort Elementary Wye
   Campbelltown Ardrossan

Peer Support Training Evaluation

Part I - Listening Test[1]

Please listen to the statement being read and circle the answer which best describes what the speaker really meant. Please circle only one answer.

1. Let's go see him again.

   1. I just can't wait.
   2. I'd like to get something from him.
   3. I never want to see him again.
   4. I really enjoy seeing him.

2. I'll talk to you again tomorrow.

   1. I sure hope not.
   2. I'm too sad to talk now.
   3. I'll talk to you again tomorrow.
   4. I'd like to get rid of you.

3. I'm sure I can handle it.

   1. Don't bother me.
   2. I'm quite confident of that.
   3. I have a few doubts.
   4. ... but you can't.

4. I can't smile or laugh.
    1. ... so just leave me alone.
    2. I'm confused.
    3. I feel stagnant.
    4. I feel really sad.
5. I'm really glad you're here.
    1. I'm angry because it took you so long.
    2. I'm surprised to see you.
    3. ... so when are you going to leave?
    4. It's a relief to see you.
6. Nothing has gone right today.
    1. I'm feeling depressed.
    2. ... but I'm looking forward to tomorrow.
    3. ... and it's your fault.
    4. I'm really confused.
7. She doesn't have any time for me.
    1. I'm better than her.
    2. I feel guilty for being so selfish.
    3. I'm jealous because she spends all her time with him.
    4. I feel sorry for myself.

8. I thought I'd done well.
    1. I'm mad that you don't agree.
    2. I feel good.
    3. I'm very upset.
    4. I'm surprised I didn't do better.
9. Can you believe it?
    1. I don't believe it.
    2. I'm really excited.
    3. The nerve of some people...
    4. It discourages me.
10. No, that's much too hard.
    1. I can't do it.
    2. Don't do it like that.
    3. That scares me.
    4. It's a bore.

Part II - Helpful Responses

For each of the following, read the problem and circle the most helpful statement you could make.

1. Second grader:

   They won't let me play soccer!

   1. Who wouldn't? What happened? Who saw it?
   2. It's no big deal- who needs those guys anyway? Recess is almost over.
   3. It hurts to be turned down. Let's try and think of something we can do about this.
   4. It must really hurt to be turned down. Let's go talk to their teachers about this.

2. First grader:

   Annie hates me and I hate her!

   1. The thing to do is stand up to her- don't let her push you around.
   2. You're pretty upset with Annie.
   3. Oh come on! You really don't mean that! You don't hate anyone!
   4. It sounds like you and Annie have some pretty strong feelings about each other. Let's find a quiet place and talk about this some more.

3. Third grader:

   My mom expects me to always pick up my little brother from kindergarten. I'm afraid I'll forget him one day and he'll get lost.

   1. Your mom sounds like she really trusts you with alot of responsibility- that can be pretty scary sometimes.
   2. That really sounds like it's tough to do. Maybe he could start walking home by himself.
   3. Can't he walk home by himself yet?
   4. You feel like your mom has given you too much responsibility for your little brother.

4. Second grader:

   No one will play with me!

   1. I've seen you on the playground and you don't act that nicely to other kids. Remember- to get a friend you have to be a friend!
   2. Boy, it sure sounds like you're feeling pretty lonely. You'd like all this to change but you're not sure if it ever will.
   3. You're feeling really lonely because no one plays or talks to you during recess.
   4. You're really upset.

5. Fourth grader:

My mom and dad had a big fight last night.

1. It sounds like you're scared they're going to break up.
2. I know what you mean. My parents fight alot too. It's their problem- not yours.
3. It's sure scary when parents fight. I'll bet you're worried that they're going to break up and wonder what will happen to you.
4. Let's go play on the playground equipment. It will help you take your mind off things.

6. Fifth grader:

What's the use of studying for this test anyway?

1. I dunno, I always do best when I don't study- why don't you try that?
2. Sounds like you're feeling sort of bored with studying. Would you like to figure out a way to make it less boring?
3. Mrs. Harper runs a study group for grade five's- want to check it out?
4. Because practice makes perfect!

7. Fourth grader:

I wish my parents would get off my back!

1. I really understand what you're saying- I used to feel the same way. I'm guessing that you're feeling pretty frustrated because your parents are treating you like a baby.
2. It's really something how some parents can treat their kids!
3. Don't let them bother you.
4. You're really angry with them for treating you like a baby.

8. Second grader:

We're moving to Calgary- how am I going to make new friends?

1. Moving somewhere new is pretty scary.
2. You sound worried about moving. I'm glad you told me about this. Let's think of some ways to help you make new friends when you get to Calgary.
3. It's a drag to move.
4. Calgary? Great! You'll be closer to the mountains! Are you going to cheer for the Calgary Flames now?

9. First grader:

I saw my brother smoking a cigarette.

1. You're wondering whether to tell on him or not.
2. It's his life- if he wants to get lung cancer there's nothing that you can do about it.
3. Sounds like you're a little worried about him, and confused about what to do about his smoking. Would you like to find a quiet place and talk some more about this?
4. I'll bet you're confused about what to do.

10. Sixth grader:

I'm thinking of trying out for a really good hockey team- do you think I could make it?

1. Of course you can make it! You can do anything you want to! Want to go play chess?
2. I really admire you. Could it be that you're feeling a little nervous about trying out?
3. Hey! I'm trying out for that team too!
4. It's pretty scary to get out there and have all those coaches watching you. I know you though and I figure that you'll go out there and give it your best shot- no matter how scared you are!

III. Problem Situations

For each problem situation, write down as many appropriate things you can think of to say to the person. Circle what you think is the most helpful of all the statements you wrote down.

1. There's this girl in my class who's turning everyone against me. I haven't done anything to her! I don't have any friends left because of her.

2. I'm really mad. My friend keeps calling "banana nose". I know that I have a pretty big nose, but it really hurts my feelings when he calls me that name. I'm going to punch his lights out the next time he says it. I don't care if I'm in class or not!

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FOOTNOTE

1. The items from this portion of the test were taken verbatim from the Jones Mohr Listening Test (1976). Permission to use the items for educational or training activities is granted provided the following is stated:

Reproduced from:
The Jones-Mohr Listening Test
John E. Jones and Lawrence Mohr
La Jolla, California: University Associates, Inc., 1976

Appendix D

Item Analysis of the Peer Support Training Evaluation

Item Analysis of the Peer Support Training Evaluation: Pre Test

Item	Option	Number	Point Biserial	Means
1				
	1	30	-0.15	11.10
	2	4	0.03	12.25
	3	5	-0.11	10.40
	4c	77	0.18	12.23
2				
	1	9	-0.05	11.33
	2c	47	0.24	12.72
	3	52	-0.16	11.35
	4	8	-0.10	10.75
3				
	1	25	-0.15	11.04
	2c	81	0.26	12.37
	3	8	-0.24	9.25
	4	2	0.01	12.00
4				
	1	20	-0.19	10.65
	2	17	0.04	12.18
	3	7	-0.07	11.00
	4c	72	0.15	12.21
5				
	1	4	0.06	12.75
	2	31	-0.39	9.97
	3	11	-0.08	11.18
	4	70	0.38	12.76
6				
	1c	104	0.25	12.11
	2	0	0.00	00.00
	3	4	-0.07	10.75
	4	8	-0.24	9.25
7				
	1	12	-0.05	11.42
	2	2	-0.13	9.00
	3c	71	0.34	12.65
	4	31	-0.30	10.42
8				
	1	31	-0.14	11.19
	2	24	-0.09	11.33
	3	9	-0.11	10.78
	4c	52	0.26	12.69

9				
	1	34	0.00	11.88
	2c	39	0.13	12.38
	3	36	-0.08	11.53
	4	7	-0.11	10.57
10				
	1	78	0.09	12.05
	2	9	-0.27	9.11
	3c	28	0.07	12.21
	4	1	0.00	12.00
11				
	1	10	-0.09	11.00
	2	7	-0.34	8.00
	3c	83	0.50	12.78
	4	16	-0.35	9.31
12				
	1	2	-0.13	9.00
	2	3	-0.12	9.67
	3	30	-0.42	9.77
	4c	81	0.48	12.79
13				
	1c	74	0.35	12.62
	2	1	-0.22	5.00
	3	5	-0.28	8.00
	4	36	-0.19	11.03
14				
	1	46	-0.16	11.28
	2c	45	0.26	12.82
	3	20	-0.05	11.55
	4	5	-0.15	9.80
15				
	1	7	-0.22	9.29
	2	13	-0.06	11.38
	3c	62	0.31	12.71
	4	34	-0.18	11.03
16				
	1	4	-0.22	8.50
	2c	60	0.34	12.83
	3	35	-0.18	11.06
	4	17	-0.14	10.88
17				
	1c	74	0.49	12.93
	2	11	-0.33	8.91
	3	18	-0.27	10.00
	4	13	-0.12	10.85
18				
	1	7	-0.16	10.00
	2c	88	0.38	12.49
	3	5	-0.21	9.00
	4	16	-0.24	10.13

19				
	1	12	-0.33	9.00
	2	11	-0.18	10.27
	3c	86	0.44	12.62
	4	7	-0.16	10.00
20				
	1	15	-0.40	8.80
	2	13	-0.09	11.15
	3	6	-0.26	8.67
	4c	82	0.48	12.77

Item Analysis of the Peer Support Training Evaluation: Post Test

Item	Option	Number	Point Biserial	Means
1				
	1	40	-0.11	11.77
	2	4	-0.10	10.75
	3	3	0.03	12.67
	4c	69	0.13	12.54
2				
	1	9	-0.13	10.89
	2c	74	0.24	12.74
	3	30	-0.16	11.43
	4	3	-0.07	11.00
3				
	1	27	-0.19	11.22
	2c	7	-0.01	12.14
	4	5	-0.19	9.60
4				
	1	11	-0.13	11.09
	2	15	0.02	12.33
	3	9	-0.10	11.22
	4c	81	0.13	12.46
5				
	1	2	-0.01	12.00
	2	18	-0.11	11.44
	3	9	-0.13	10.89
	4c	87	0.18	12.52
6				
	1c	103	0.24	12.47
	2	2	-0.12	9.50
	3	1	-0.17	7.00
	4	10	-0.16	10.70
7				
	1	11	-0.17	10.73
	2	4	-0.05	11.50
	3c	81	0.22	12.64
	4	20	-0.12	11.45
8				
	1	26	-0.08	11.77
	2	18	0.00	12.22
	3	9	-0.29	9.33
	4c	63	0.22	12.81

9				
	1	29	-0.19	11.24
	2c	47	0.27	13.17
	3	35	-0.10	11.77
	4	5	-0.02	12.00
10				
	1	72	-0.00	12.21
	2	13	-0.18	10.77
	3c	30	0.11	12.77
	4	1	0.09	15.00
11				
	1	4	-0.11	10.50
	2	11	-0.49	7.82
	3c	89	0.54	13.08
	4	12	-0.21	10.42
12				
	1	6	-0.38	7.50
	2	9	-0.08	11.44
	3	20	-0.26	10.55
	4c	81	0.44	13.06
13				
	1c	64	0.31	13.03
	2	6	-0.23	9.33
	3	4	-0.11	10.50
	4	42	-0.17	11.55
14				
	1	45	-0.18	11.56
	2c	28	0.40	14.29
	3	35	-0.15	11.57
	4	8	-0.07	11.50
15				
	1	13	-0.05	11.77
	2	16	-0.23	10.56
	3c	57	0.50	13.70
	4	30	-0.36	10.47
16				
	1	3	-0.35	6.00
	2c	63	0.32	13.08
	3	33	0.03	12.33
	4	17	-0.33	9.88
17				
	1c	72	0.41	13.14
	2	9	-0.38	8.44
	3	16	-0.15	11.13
	4	19	-0.12	11.42
18				
	1	7	-0.14	10.57
	2c	84	0.42	12.98
	3	6	-0.33	8.17
	4	19	-0.23	10.74

19				
	1	10	-0.29	9.50
	2	6	-0.37	7.67
	3c	89	0.50	13.01
	4	11	-0.17	10.73
20				
	1	12	-0.27	9.92
	2	15	-0.14	11.13
	3	11	-0.30	9.55
	4c	78	0.46	13.15

Appendix E

Scale for Rating Helper Responses

Scale for Rating Helper Responses

Please read the identified "best response" and rate it on the following scale:

1. Level 1.0 Not Helpful (Harmful)
   A response in which the helper:
   - ignores what the helper is saying,
   - ridicules the helpee's feelings,
   - seeks to impose own beliefs and values on helpee,
   - dominates the conversation,
   - challenges the accuracy of the helpee's perception,
   - uses problem-solving dimensions in a way that damages the relationship.

2. Level 2.0 Not Helpful (Ineffective)
   A response in which the helper:
   - communicates a partial awareness of the helpee's surface feelings,
   - gives premature or superficial advice,
   - responds in a casual or mechanical way,
   - reflects total content but ignores the feelings of the helpee,
   - uses problem-solving dimensions in a way that impedes the relationship,
   - offers rational excuses for withholding involvement.

3. Level 3.0 Helpful (Facilitative)
   A response in which the helper:
   - reflects accurately and completely the helpee's surface feelings,
   - communicates acceptance of the helpee as a person of worth.

4. Level 4.0 Helpful (Additive)
   A response in which the helper:
   - demonstrates willingness to help and accurately perceives and responds to the helpee's underlying feelings (empathy),
   - appropriately uses one or more of the problem-solving dimensions to:
     - assist the helpee to move from vagueness to clarity (concreteness),
     - reveal perceptions of the helpee in their entirety (genuineness),
     - share similar experiences (self-disclosure),
     - suggest things the helpee might do (expertise),
     - point out discrepancies in the helpee's words and/or actions (confrontation),

-talk about present feelings between the helpee and helper (immediacy).

Source: Gazda et al., 1984.